

MAKING ARCHAEOLOGISTS

June 30, 2012 Beth Pruitt Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Education, Excavation, Historical Archaeology Anthropology, Archaeological sub-disciplines, archaeologist, Archaeology, Archaeology in Annapolis, Barbara Little, Ben Skolnik, Beth Pruitt, Brick Row, Brittany Hutchinson, Duncan Winterwyer, Field School, historical archaeology, Julia Torres Vasquez, Kate Deeley, Lauren Hicks, Maria Franklin, Mark Leone, Maryland, Matt Hagar, Molly Greenhouse, Naval Academy, Paige Diamond, Plantation Archaeology, Richard Nyachiro, Theresa Singleton, United States, University of Maryland



Matt Hagar, Beth Pruitt, and Lauren Hicks on the East Cove screen. Source: Kate Deeley

The weather report says that today is hot and humid. High 101° F. Heat index near 110° F. The students of the 2012 [Archaeology in Annapolis](#) field school from the University of Maryland know that it will be a sweltering and tiring day as they walk through their morning haze to collect their equipment from storage. They also can't wait to see what they will find today.

Two weeks ago, we were in Annapolis. In view of the Maryland state capitol building, we excavated in three backyards, exploring the connections of

past tenants to the Naval Academy and to nineteenth century immigration to the United States. For the second half of the field school, we moved to the Wye House plantation on Maryland's Eastern Shore, home to a line of Edward Lloyds stretching back to the mid-seventeenth century. Here, the students chase the foundation walls of two slave quarters discovered [last year](#).

The site is separated into two parts. The South Long Green is located on the yard of the plantation, within sight of the Great House, and the home of the remains of a two-story brick slave quarter. The East Cove, where the students search for a building called the "Brick Row Quarter" on a historic map, is sheltered by a thicket of trees across the creek from the Long Green.



South Long Green students. Source: Ben Skolnik

In running the field school, co-directors Kate Deeley, Ben Skolnik, and I recognize that we must perform a balancing act—prioritizing in turns the education of undergraduate students, our PhD dissertation research, and the communication of information to the public. It is a mixture of a classroom and training grounds. The instruction is as much somatic as it is intellectual, and the students have come a long way in their movements within the units, techniques with the trowel, and familiarity with the artifacts and their significance.



Richard Nyachiro with his measuring tape.

Source: Ben Skolnik

The other element to add to the juggling show is motivation and good spirits, especially on a day like today. The excitement grows as the brick rubble, glass, nails, and ceramic sherds coalesce into interpretations about where these buildings are situated on the landscape and in time. Despite this, the work is hard and the knowledge that Monday will be their last day to dig their units is beginning to settle in. Conversation is informal and playful—ranging from the childhood nostalgia of Pokémon to everyone’s top desert-island reading choices—and it helps the buckets of dirt go swiftly by.

After lunch, the students are joined by Dr. Mark Leone and gather on the East Cove for the site seminars, which are held every Friday. The shade of dense trees is a relief. One by one, the crew of each unit describes to the rest of the class the

accomplishments and interpretations of that week. Using an extended folding ruler as a pointer, the crewmates take turns to indicate features, explain level changes, and point out soon-to-be-excavated artifacts.

It is a chance not only for the students to connect their unit to the others within the larger landscape, but also to proudly demonstrate their knowledge and achievements. They grow accustomed to fielding questions about the steps they took and the conclusions they continue to draw from their findings. After the students on the East Cove complete their tour, we move across the creek to the South Long Green.



Duncan Winterwyer with his root clippers. Source: Ben Skolnik



Brittany Hutchinson with her shovel. Source: Ben Skolnik

The students applaud their peers and create a rough circle in the shade of a tulip poplar tree. Though the environment is quite different, this is still a college class. There are weekly reading assignments, and each Friday afternoon the students discuss what they have read. The articles for today, focusing on race, class, gender, and identity in historical archaeology, are Barbara Little’s “She was... an Example to Her Sex” (1994), Maria Franklin’s “The Archaeological Dimensions of Soul Food: Interpreting Race, Culture, and Afro-Virginian Identity” (2001), and Theresa Singleton’s “Race, Class, and Identity among Free Blacks in the Antebellum South” (2001). The students direct the conversation, working through the topics of race, critical theory, politics, and the differences between an archaeology of gender and a feminist archaeology.

Like any other class, writing assignments provide a means for the students to individually articulate what they have learned. To balance this academic obligation with the project’s emphasis on public outreach, the students contribute to the Archaeology in Annapolis blog. They demonstrate their comprehension of the work they complete in their units while also practicing their abilities to communicate this information to a general audience. Undergraduate Paige Diamond’s [post](#), written today, highlights the discovery of the east wall of the two story quarter.

Throughout the day, Ben pulls students aside to pose for “dirty archaeologist portraits.” He encourages them to take pride in their sweat-soaked, filthy appearance and take pictures with their field equipment. They take possession of this identity—archaeologists in the field. The portraits show the students as they are now at the end of the field school: trained archaeologists armed with the methods and knowledge that will allow them to contribute a unique perspective to this or any other field.



Julia Torres Vasquez and Molly Greenhouse create the American Plantation Gothic. Source: Ben Skolnik

To see more archaeologist portraits from today, please visit our [Flickr account](#). For more information about our excavations, please visit our [blog](#).